



Mexican players take part in specialised sprint drills during a training session in Puerto La Cruz on Friday.

Onus on Brazil

Battle enters second round

INTERNET, undated



All teams have already made their debut in the Copa America in Venezuela as the start of the tournament impressed spectators with a generous count of goals and many surprising results.

Perhaps inspired by Argentine legend Diego Maradona's honorary kick-off, a total of 24 goals have been scored in the first six games of the Copa, an outstanding average of four goals per match.

Moreover, Brazil - the land of 'jogo bonito' and everyone's candidate when it comes to attacking football - is one of only three teams among 12 participants that have not scored.

Indeed, Brazil appears as the main casualty of this first round of games in Venezuela. The team coached by Carlos Dunga is admittedly playing the Copa with its second-best squad, without the likes of Ronaldinho and Kaka who chose to rest after a long European season.

However, the five-time world champion hardly expected to lose so clearly, by 2-0, to a Mexican side that is also lacking its stars Pavel Pardo, Ricardo Osorio and Carlos Salcido and which was troubled by the recent loss to the United in the Gold Cup final.

Precisely a Mexican, Olympiakos striker Nery Castillo, scored what is so far the best goal of the tournament. Castillo showed off his quality by lifting the ball to get past defender Maicon and then to beat goalkeeper Doni.

The other possible candidate to lift the trophy July 15 in Maracaibo,

country where football ranks behind other sports such as baseball, is no longer systematically the best team in the region.

The host meant to consolidate this rise on home turf, also in the hope of increasing attendance figures in the country's stadiums. Instead, it allowed lowly Bolivia to equalize 2-2 only seven minutes from time in their match.

As the team moves into the second-round of play from Saturday, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador and the host will be particularly under pressure to put things right and keep up their chances of going through to the quarterfinals.

On paper, such options remain almost intact, since eight of the 12

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PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian striker Robinho refreshes himself with cold water during a training session in Puerto La Cruz on Friday.

Drogba still in doubt

EUROSPORT, undated

Didier Drogba has refused to commit himself to Chelsea, saying he will make a decision on his future when he returns from holiday.

The Ivory Coast international recently said he is at the last big turning point in his career, and appears no closer to pledging his future to the club.

"You want to know if I will still return to Chelsea? I will reply to that when I am ready. For now I am having a deserved vacation," said Drogba.

"I love the English league and may not be in a hurry to leave England. But it's difficult to really predict what I want to do in the next week."

Earlier this month, the 29-year-old said he would like to play in Spain or Italy before the end of his career.

Drogba was Chelsea's key player last season, playing nearly 60 games and scoring 33 times, but his latest comments are a clear indication he is not entirely happy at Stamford Bridge.

"I have been working hard and would love to win the Champions League with Chelsea. But, for now, let's just wait and see," he said.

Rafa plans Heinze swoop

SPORTINGLIFE, undated

Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez is planning an audacious swoop to hijack Juventus' £5million move for Manchester United left-back Carlos Heinze.

The 29-year-old is currently on international duty with Argentina at the Copa America and was expected to tie up his move to Juve upon returning.

However Benitez has now registered his interest in Heinze according to the Sun and the Anfield boss could pull off the deal if he is prepared to pay the Red Devils' asking price.

Heinze is said to be happy in the north-west and would welcome the chance to stay in the area, although he may not want to risk the wrath of United's fans by joining their fierce rivals.

He said of the interest in him:

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Galletti signs for Olympiakos

AFP, Athens

Greek champions Olympiakos announced Friday that Argentine striker Luciano Martin Galletti has penned a four-year contract.

The club did not release financial details of the deal.

Galletti, 27, has played 13 matches for Argentina, scoring three goals.

For the last two seasons Galletti played for Atletico Madrid and before that for Real Zaragoza (2001-2005), Estudiantes (2000-2001 and 1997-1999) and in Italy for SSC Napoli and Parma AC (1999-2000).

"I am very happy and want to

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FedExpress crushes Safin

AFP, London



Roger Federer took another confident step closer to a fifth successive Wimbledon title on Friday as Centre Court fell in love with an eyebrow-pierced, Russian literature-loving Serb called Tipsy.

Federer defeated former world number one Marat Safin 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) to register his 51st grasscourt win in a row and will now face experienced German Tommy Haas, who put out Russia's Dmitry Tursunov, for a quarterfinal spot.

"I was pleased with my performance because I knew the danger against Marat," said Federer. "It says 'beauty will save the world,'" explained the Serb, who has been christened Tipsy by locals.

There were really tricky conditions, swirling winds and a tough opponent. I was doing a good job of

keeping the ball in play, keeping it low to his forehand with my slice and I took my chances."

But if the Swiss is the undisputed king of Centre Court, then Serbia's unheralded world number 64 Janko Tipsarevic was prince for a day when he knocked out Chilean fifth seed Fernando Gonzalez 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 8-6.

His reward was a place in the last 16, where he will meet Spain's Juan Carlos Ferrero, who put out American ninth seed James Blake in four sets.

Tipsarevic received a standing ovation and then revealed that he was such a fan of Fyodor Dostoyevsky that he has tattooed a quote from the Russian writer into his arm.

He goes on to meet Daniela Hantuchova.

Martina Hingis, the women's champion in 1997, saw her 2007

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Real catch Robben!

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have agreed a deal to sign Chelsea's flying Dutch winger Arjen Robben according to reports in a Spanish newspaper on Saturday.

AS claims that Real have come to an agreement with the father and agent of Robben and are waiting for Chelsea to rubber stamp a 20-million-euro transfer.

Robben is currently in negotiations with Chelsea over a contract extension until 2012, although he has not always been in favour with the club's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho.

The 23-year-old is thought to be among Real's top three summer transfer targets alongside AC Milan's Brazilian playmaker Kaka and Arsenal's Spanish midfielder Cesc Fabregas.

She goes on to meet Daniela Hantuchova.

Martina Hingis, the women's champion in 1997, saw her 2007

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Hingis bows out

AFP, London



Hingis, 26, has found it hard to recapture her previous glories since coming out of retirement last year and this was further proof that she is struggling to compete at the highest level.

The former world number one had survived two match points before finally beating Naomi Cavaday, a British wild card entry, on Court Two in the first round, but there was no escape from the curse this time.

Hingis, the ninth seed, looked a shadow of the player who won Wimbledon ten years ago as Granville triumphed 6-4, 6-2 on Court Two, where so many previous All England Club winners have come unstuck.

Granville, who has only reached the second week of a Grand Slam once before, now faces a fourth round tie against Dutch teenager Michaella Krajicek.

"I had to miss out on the French Open and I just didn't want to miss Wimbledon."

"Probably it wasn't the smartest thing, but at least I gave myself a chance. I'm getting into better condition instead of not doing anything."

The contrast between the bubbly 16-year-old, who became Centre Court's darling when she beat Jana Novotna in the 1997 final, and Hingis's timid display here could not have been more marked.

Granville, the world number 77, had arrived at the All England Club on the back of six defeats in her last seven Tour matches.

But she has found her form in south-west London and showed no signs of being overawed by Hingis.

Once Granville had broken in

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L'pool close in on Torres

AFP, Madrid

Spanish press reported on Saturday that Atletico Madrid star Fernando Torres was closer than ever to making a move to English Premiership side Liverpool.

Reports claim that Liverpool have offered attacking midfielder Luis Garcia and 32 million euros in an attempt to prise the striker away from Madrid.

"Barring a strange and unexpected turn of events, the Atletico captain will don the colours of Liverpool next season," said El Pais.

And according to sports newspaper Marca, the clubs have agreed on the deal and it is now down to 23-year-old Torres to make the final decision.

On Wednesday the BBC had claimed that the two clubs were in

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Mikael out of the picture

Football

EUROSPORT, undated

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. So rather than write out "Mikael Silvestre is leaving Manchester United" 166.7 times, we'll just let you know that the Frenchman does not feature in United's squad photo for the forthcoming season.

Speaking of defensively suspect, is that Brazilian sheep in wolf's clothing Edmilon winging his way to Newcastle?

Perhaps not - the free transfer looks set to stall over the Barcelona man's exorbitant wage demands and his dodgy knees, which kept him out for six months last season.

Transfer Talk knew Edmilon was dodgy the moment he left his post at the back to roam forward and score an overhead kick against

Costa Rica in the 2002 World Cup.

Not content to splurge £27 million on Fernando Torres, Liverpool want yet another Spanish tutor for Jamie Carragher.

This time it is Gabriel Heinze, who had looked like joining Real Madrid after falling out of favour at Manchester United.

The Argentinian hard man would do well to note that Madrid's steak restaurants are vastly superior to Liverpool's, but it may not matter if Rafa Benitez waves £6 million in front of the Glazers.

He really is the man who puts the 'E' in Anfield. Amazing that hasn't caught on...

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PHOTO: AFP

World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland appreciates a standing ovation from the Centre Court crowd after he defeated Russian star Marat Safin in the third round of Wimbledon on Friday.

Beware of pickpockets

AFP, London



Wimbledon stars have fallen victim to a sneak thief who has made off with thousands of pounds in cash and personal property, it was claimed.

French player Michael Llodra has also had his wallet taken even though he was only away from his locker for 30 seconds.

The problem has infuriated players and coaches some of whom feel one of their own must be responsible.

"We are aware of the incident and we have told our staff in the locker room to be extra vigilant, but it is difficult with so many people in the area. It is up to the player concerned to inform the police," said a

compatriot Feliciano Lopez, had a bag stolen containing 1,700 euros and 1,000 dollars in cash at the All England Club, the Daily Mail claimed.

There have been a number of thefts from the changing rooms at events around the world this year.

Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman reported personal effects stolen at both the Australian and French Opens while the Daily Mail claimed that at last week's Wimbledon qualifying event at Roehampton, Dane Kenneth Carlsen had his watch stolen and Frenchman Nicolas Mahut his iPod.

The biggest single theft is believed to be the loss of 5,000 euros suffered by Czech player Radek Stepanek, the fiance of Martina Hingis, at the Monte Carlo Open in April.

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Tevez to decide after Copa

EUROSPORT, undated

West Ham and Argentina striker Carlos Tevez will decide where his future lies after the Copa America, his representative said.

Tevez, 23, reportedly ruled out a move to Internazionale yesterday when he refused to meet their "take it or leave it" deadline, preferring to focus on Argentina's campaign and trying to engineer a stay in the Premiership with West Ham or one of the top four.

"Carlos is playing in the Copa America at the moment and that is where his prime focus is," his representative Kia Joorabchian said. "It is a big competition and we intend talking more seriously about his future when that tournament is over."

"At the moment there is no development."

Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal are all reportedly interested in the former Boca

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Argentine playmaker Carlos Tevez enters the Union Atletica training ground in Maracaibo with a pair of boots on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP



Argentine playmaker Carlos Tevez enters the Union Atletica training ground in Maracaibo with a pair of boots on Friday.